

The Luxe Cocktail



The last decade has seen a noticeable change in cocktail creation and consumption with more expensive ingredients served in more elegant glasses creating truly memorable experiences. **Suneeta Sodhi Kanga** invites you to join in the luxury cocktail celebrations

FUZZY NAVEL, The Flaming Dr. Pepper, Death in the Afternoon, Hanky-Panky, Salty Dog, Moscow Mule, Japanese Slipper... these are some of the strange names you may have come across in a bar menu under the cocktails section. Stirred, shaken, neat, on the rocks, straight up, with a kick, or dirty—however you order them, everyone loves a good cocktail. A good cocktail offers more than just a tasty combination of liquor and mixers but also a great story.

Cocktails may vary in their ingredients from bartender to bartender, and from one bar to another. Two creations may have the same name but taste very different because of differences in how the drinks are prepared. The cocktail has infused itself into our popular, historical and literary culture, often becoming as iconic as the famous men and women who drank them and the bartenders who created them. They have inspired famous artists

and poets, the title for a cheesy 1988 Tom Cruise film, socialite parties, a genre of above-the-knee black dresses and bar tenders' creativity.

Novice or professional, anyone who has been even slightly tuned in to what has been going on in the last decade will recognise the significant change in the cocktail world. Today most people have a renewed appreciation of a well-crafted cocktail made from the best ingredients. The trends of the last decade can be summarised in a few short words: 'Drink better not more'.

Within the last decade there has been a renewed interest, almost a frantic desire, for reviving the cocktail in its purest, most celebrated, and well-crafted form. This has brought the term 'mixology' back into our vocabularies. Hoteliers have started to accept and are investing in bartending as a skill.

Liquor majors and importers have played a big part in imparting training,

conducting competitions, organising tours at distilleries and placing experienced bartenders in hotel bars to mentor and raise standards to a large extent. Lastly, bartending schools like the Tulleeho Academy and Stir have been instrumental in opening up the world of bartending to hopefuls in an informed fashion.

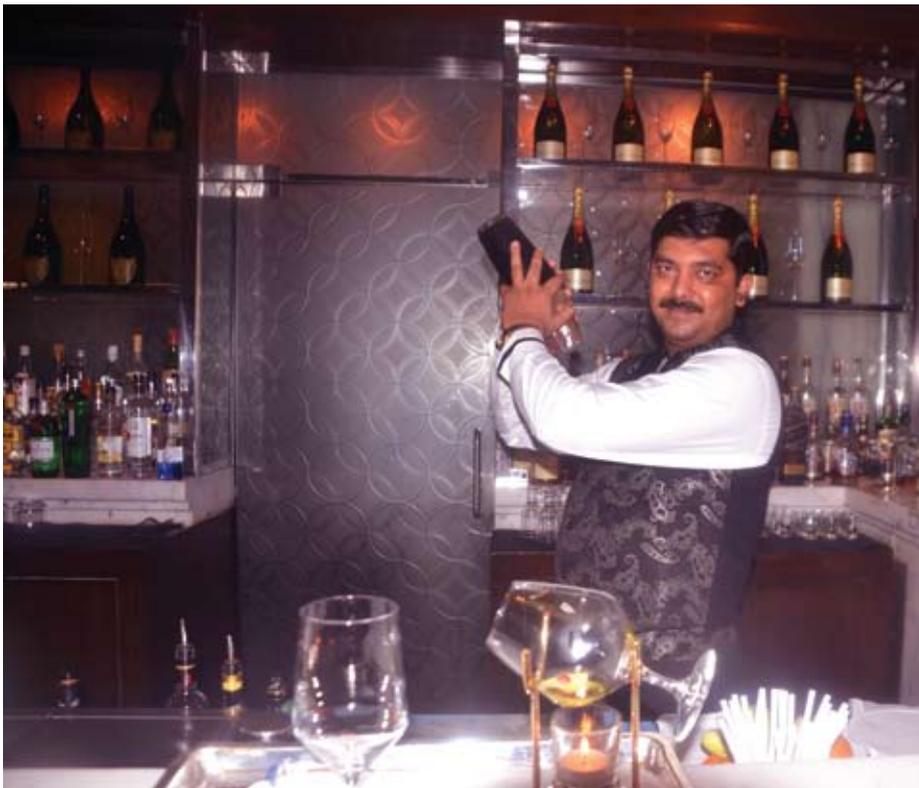
According to Shatbhi Basu, who heads the Stir Academy of Bartending, “Mixology in the 21st century has not only led to a renewed interest in classic cocktails and old school techniques, ones which you are willing to wait 5-10 minutes for, but also to a higher quality of ingredients and innovative adaptations of the traditional concept of a drink. Bartenders are inclined to make unusual and exotic cocktails. The mantra is to impress your guests. Within the last decade more and more bartenders have treated drinks like a five-star chef treats his dishes.”

Varun Sudhakar of the Four Seasons Hotel, Mumbai who was conferred the title of the National Winner of Diageo Reserve World Class 2014, India edition for the second year in a row, has transitioned from a flair bartender to become one of Mumbai’s finest mixologists. He says, ‘I believe all cocktails are already created, what we do is reconstruct. I listen to guests, ask them what their taste is, try to mix their favourite ingredients with some flair, listen to the ice and serve the drinks with a good garnish and a smile. I feel completely locked into that drink till the time that it’s served. I have never felt guests expect anything else rather than a drink served with a smile and happiness surrounding it.’

Abhas Saxena, Sommelier, The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai says that freshness is showing up in the bar through numerous ways beyond a citrus press squeezing fresh lemon and lime juice. It has also appeared via fresh herbs and spices, homemade ingredients like sour mix, simple syrup and

willing to spend more on the good stuff. At Mumbai’s fine dining restaurants and upscale bars, it’s becoming increasingly common for people to spend a thousand bucks on a decent cocktail.

For a certain growing clientele, prices are no deterrent. And perhaps it is this bunch that is fuelling the trend. At the Dublin bar in ITC, Parel when a customer orders a Luxury Martini, the bar turns off the bar’s signature retro music. There is a ritual involved. It makes people in the whole bar stop and look. The bartender lays down a mat studded with crystals in front of the customer, and places a salver on it. He then places the cocktail, served in an Arcoroc martini glass, on the salver and announces, “Sir, here is your Luxury Martini.”



PICS: NALIN SOLANKI

grenadine, and an appreciation of the bar’s most important ingredient—clean ice. All of these little elements make a significant difference in today’s popular drinks.

There have always been trends in the bar, whether it was the vodka craze when it first became a cocktail favourite in the middle of the last century or the overly sweet, creamy drinks and oversized portions a few decades later. The current craze has changed by flavour and freshness. Most of these flavour crazes have been influenced by the healthy lifestyles and the fruits that help us lead those. Most notably are pomegranate, absinthe, bitters, purées and reductions of dry fruits and herbs like apricot, clove and aniseed.

Quality is key to this new spirits market. This pretty much means luxury cocktails are here to stay. Even with some of our favourite brands, we are

At the Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai, their signature cocktail ‘From the Harbour since 1933’ is served with fanfare. And while the bartender is preparing the elaborate cocktail he enjoys narrating the story of its origins to the guests.

The Martini and the Manhattan have always been in our thoughts, but those like the Mojito are a favourite again.

Take a look at some of Mumbai’s most expensive cocktails from the Taj Mahal Palace and the Four Seasons Hotel, Mumbai.

World’s most expensive cocktails

- **Ono Champagne Cocktail (\$10,000):** The Encore Wynn hotel in Las Vegas serves this cocktail in an 18kt gold necklace on a jewel-encrusted glass. The rare 1981 Charles Heidsieck champagne, \$90,000 Louis XIII Black Pearl cognac as well as fresh orange juice, apricot juice and rose nectar are used.
- **Sazerac Cocktail (\$8316):** The legend of the London bar scene, Salvatore Calabrese is the maestro behind Salvatore’s Bar at the Playboy Club. Besides his legendary Sazerac cocktail made with an 1805 Sazerac de Forge, it is his Salvatore’s Legacy, which broke the Guinness Records for using the oldest ingredients.
- **The Winston (\$12,916):** An Australian bartender set a new Guinness Record for the most expensive cocktail. The price of the cocktail is thanks to its two nips of 1858 Croizet cognac, a bottle of which has a \$157,000 value and it goes for \$6,000 per shot. There’s also some Grand Marnier Quintessence, Chartreuse Vieillessement Exceptionnellement Prolonge, a dash of Angostura bitters and other fancy touches such as chocolate nutmeg dust.



From the Harbour

Ingredients: 60ml Tanqueray10 Gin; 30ml Chartreuse; 15ml peach liqueur; 120ml pineapple juice; 60ml cranberry juice

Method: Place fresh cuts of green apple and pomegranate seeds in a cognac glass. Add Chartreuse. Place a few apple cuts and pomegranate seeds in a shaker. Add gin, pineapple and cranberry juice. Shake with ice cubes and then flambé the Chartreuse. Pour slowly.

History: 1920 to 1933 was the prohibition era in America. Two American officers received the news of the lift of prohibition when their yacht was passing the Taj Mahal Hotel. They decided to dock their yacht and celebrate at the Harbour Bar. The bartender made a concoction of gin, fresh juices and fruits and flambéed the Chartreuse. On being served, the guests requested the name of the cocktail. The bartender said, "Sir, since it's a special occasion, why don't you decide the name," "From the Harbour," one replied. And that's how its been drunk from 1933 till today!

Cognachattan

Ingredients: 45ml Remy Martin VSOP; 15ml Martini Rosso; 5ml Absinthe Green; 5 slices ginger

Method: Slice ginger finely into 5 to 6 pieces. Muddle it with cognac, absinthe and vermouth. Post this give a rigorous shake with lots of ice. Double strain in a frosted Martini Glass and garnish with a lemon rind.

History: The Manhattan is often called the King of Cocktails or the Drinking Man's Cocktail. Regularly regarded as one of the best cocktails ever created, the Manhattan has a long and debated history.

It was supposedly first invented at the Manhattan Club in New York City in the early 1870s. Legend has it that the drink was invented for a banquet hosted by Lady Randolph Churchill (Winston Churchill's mother) in honour of presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden.

The success of the banquet quickly made the cocktail fashionable in New York City's powerful circles and prompted many people to request the drink by referring to the name of the club where it originated, calling it the Manhattan cocktail.

The Mojito Royale

Ingredients: 60ml Mount Gay XO; 15ml lime juice; 10ml sugar syrup; 10 gms brown sugar; 3 lemon wedges; 12 mint leaves

Tips: Muddle the lime to release the oil from the zest. Tap the mint leaves to release flavour. Sugar and lime juice is used for balancing the drink.

Method: The brown sugar and lemon wedges are muddled together. Mix lime juice and sugar syrup. Add mint leaves and rum. Mix with a spoon. Top with crushed ice, a dash of soda and garnish with mint sprigs. Serve with a straw and stirrer in a Collins glass.

History: The drink of sailors traditionally made using white rum, sugar or sugar cane juice, lime, carbonated water and mint muddled together, it is believed the Mojito is quite possibly the world's first cocktail. Although the image of hardened sailors drinking rum mixed with mint, lime and sugar may not match your vision of straight-from-the-bottle gulping pirates, the Mojito has been enjoyed as early as the 16th century.

One story traces the origins of the Mojito back to 16th century Cuba,

where the drink was called the El Draque in honour of explorer and sailor Sir Francis Drake. Legend has it the drink was first created as a means of covering up the often harsh taste of tafia/aguardiente, a primitive form of rum. The drink improved greatly during the 19th century with the introduction of copper stills that led to the modern (and much better tasting) form of rum.

The contemporary name for the drink probably comes from a Cuban sauce called mojo, which is made from garlic, olive oil and citrus juice. Perhaps in reference to lime as a main ingredient, the drink became known as a cocktail with 'a little mojo' or, in Spanish, a *mojito*. While the Mojito may be one of the world's first cocktails, it certainly has not waned in popularity over the years. In fact,

the drink first invented to make bad rum tolerable is now a widely popular cocktail around the world and is an especially popular and refreshing summer drink.



Saketini

Ingredients: Fresh pomegranate seeds; 15ml lime juice; 10ml sugar syrup; 20ml Cointreau; 60ml sake

Method: Muddle the pomegranate seeds in a shaker. Add rest of the ingredients and shake well. Double strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish with pomegranate seeds.

History: There are many stories surrounding the invention of the martini, but it seems that the origins of James Bond's favourite beverage may never be definitively established. Western culture has, over the years, created several and myths that surround the drink. It seems safe to say the drink was invented in the middle to late 19th century, but exactly who invented the martini is likely to remain the stuff of legend.

The three-martini lunch became a popular phrase coined for expensive, long lunches taken by business executives. In fact, the martini has become more of a class of drinks than one drink in particular—with variations like Appletinis, vodka martinis and others becoming popular over the years.

Adam's Apple

Ingredients: ½ a freshly cut red apple; 20ml apricot purée; 15ml cinnamon syrup; 15ml lemon juice; 60ml Lagavulin 16 years

Method: Muddle the apple in a shaker and add in rest of the ingredients and shake well. Single strain into a chilled rock glass. Garnish with a cinnamon stick. 🍷